



Michigan Trout Unlimited

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November 9, 2011

Michigan House of Representatives
Natural Resources, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation Committee
Re: HB4684, Comments in opposition

Dear Committee Member,

House Bill 4684 seeks to require that horseback riding be allowed on all stand lands, and removes the ability of the Department of Natural Resources to manage those lands under the objectives and restrictions required by the funds that were used to purchase them. While we support work to manage diverse recreational opportunities on our public lands, this bill would force Michigan out of compliance with federal mandates associated with the funds that were used to acquire certain lands. The US Department of Interior recently provided its opinion and interpretation of this bill to the office of this Committee's Chair (in response to a request from the Chair's office). In this, they clearly stated that this bill would be interpreted as noncompliance with federal mandates, and would result in the loss of federal funds (see also the legislative analysis for this bill which also states this fact).

The federal funds that will be lost as a result of this bill being passed include the Dingell-Johnson and Pittman-Robertson funds. These funds are created through excise taxes that sportsmen and boaters pay on their equipment. Michigan sportsmen have already paid these taxes for the purpose that they are reallocated to the states for use in supporting fish and wildlife conservation and management – and this bill would prevent those funds from their intended purpose. These funds are absolutely critical to the functioning of our Department of Natural Resources. For example, the Dingell-Johnson funds go to fisheries management activities. The Michigan DNR receives approximately \$11.7 million dollars a year from this program. The MDNR Fish Division total annual budget is approximately \$29 million dollars. This bill would result in the loss of 40% of the operating funds for fisheries management in our state. This is an unacceptable loss of funds that would cripple the DNR's ability to manage of fisheries.

This loss of funds would not only prevent fisheries management from continuing in Michigan as we know it, but would also have profound impact on the quality of our fisheries (for example, activities like stocking of fish such as walleye and salmon would be limited), and it would have a profound impact on our economy. Fishing in Michigan's waters is valued at around \$4 Billion dollars annually, and is a significant component of the tourism industry here – one of the top three sectors of our economy. This cannot be jeopardized. Please oppose this bill.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We will be glad to discuss this matter in depth if desired.

Sincerely,

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